

*Newsletter
December 1999
January 2000*

Gay Buddhist Fellowship

The Gay Buddhist Fellowship supports Buddhist practice in the Gay men's community. It is a forum that brings together the diverse Buddhist traditions to address the spiritual concerns of Gay men in the Bay Area, the United States, and the world. GBF's mission includes cultivating a social environment that is inclusive and caring.



The Ajanta cliff with carved entrances; river lower right.

Buddhist Cave Temples in India

Text and photos by Kevin Havener

Around-the-world airfares were cheap in 1988, and in September of that year I went west from San Francisco, eventually stopping in India for 16 days. Being interested in archaeology as well as in Buddhism, one of my goals was to visit the ancient Ajanta and Ellora rock-cut temples and monasteries, situated in river valleys near the city of Aurangabad (in central Maharashtra state, east of Bombay/Mumbai). The state-run Indian tour agency gave excellent tours of these remote sites, which Indian people themselves took. One elderly Indian couple was very determined to visit: the wheelchair-bound woman paid two strong young men to carry her around the sites in a makeshift sedan-chair.

Cut from living rock cliffs, the temples and monasteries sometimes echoed their wooden predecessors, with imitation wooden beams and other structural elements painstakingly carved into the stone. Artistic styles changed over generations of royal dynastic patronage, and depictions of Buddha's visage grew from plainly symbolic, to intricately decorated high-relief figures. Some of these man-made caves had numerous deep rooms, 30 to 50-foot high ceilings, and even multiple stories with interior columns and staircases. Most of the caves were inhabited by bats (and the

GBF Committees

We always want and need interested participants, so please, **JOIN IN!** Call the contact person on the committee, or talk to him (or anyone on that committee) at a GBF sitting or event. This is a great practice opportunity!

Steering Committee

Call 415.974.9878

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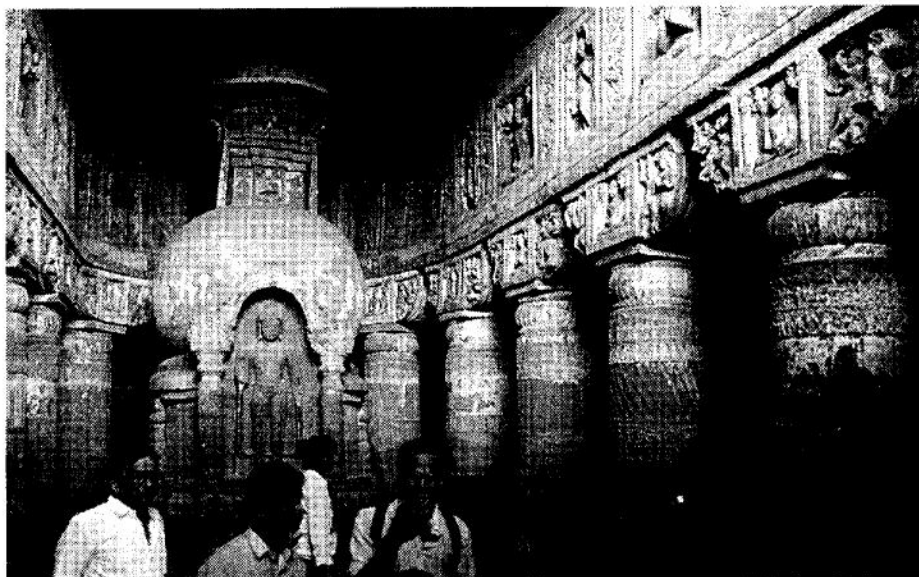
Sunday Sitting Facilitators

Call 415.974.9878

The following committees are currently without chairs:

Development Committee
Social Committee
Practice Committee

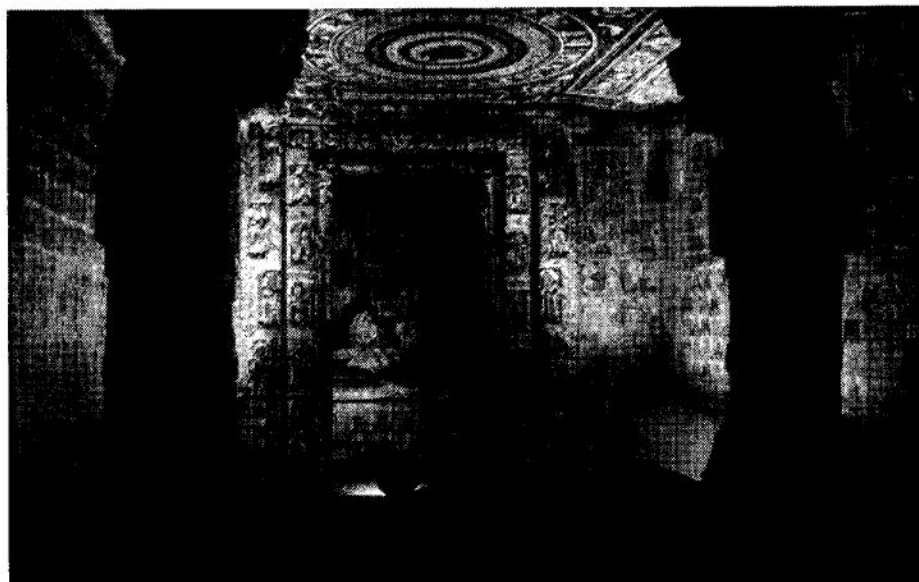
If you are interested in volunteering, please contact us at 415.974.9878.



Temple cave with standing Buddha relief on tall stupa, Ajanta.

powerful smell of their guano), illumination was often limited to daylight, and amenities were non-existent; yet all of this contributed to the excitement of being in such extraordinary places.

The Ajanta cave-temples are exclusively Buddhist, and famous for their tempera on dry plaster murals, relief carvings, and elaborate columns. The wall and ceiling paintings depict Buddhist legends, or Jataka tales, and some are incredibly, beautifully elaborate. Spanning the 2nd century BC through the 7th century AD, there are five temples/sanctuaries (chaityas) and 25 monasteries (viharas) overlooking the Wagurna river valley. Inside the oldest temple cave there is a tall, free-standing circumnambulatory stupa (funerary symbol/reliquary of Buddha) with a plain egg-shaped "burial mound" atop a squarish pedestal. Later temples have reliefs of a standing or sitting Buddha, carved onto the front of this "mound." The more numerous monastic caves usually have rows of small, plain cells with raised platforms for meditating or sleeping.



Elaborately painted sanctuary inside monastic cave at Ajanta.

